it's like i'm made of you (to adam, from your ribs)
Posted originally on the Archive of Our Own at https://archiveofourown.org/works/70524941.

Rating:
Teen And Up Audiences

Archive Warning:
No Archive Warnings Apply

Category:
M/M

Fandom:
The Pitt (TV)

Relationship:
Frank Langdon/Michael "Robby" Robinavitch

Characters:
Michael "Robby" Robinavitch, Frank Langdon, Dana Evans, Samira Mohan, Trinity Santos, Cassie McKay, Princess (The Pitt), Perlah (The Pitt)

Additional Tags:
Hospitals, langdon is brought into the hospital and robby obviously is like Ok i need to take care of this now!, Religious Imagery & Symbolism, Implied/Referenced Cheating, because well. thats a given, POV Alternating, Canon Compliant, Angst with a Happy Ending, Hurt/Comfort, Past Relationship(s), Getting Back Together, Non-Sexual Intimacy, the inherent romance of breaking your situationships ribs during cpr, Divorced Frank Langdon, Possessive Behavior, lowkey, Michael "Robby" Robinavitch is Down Bad, Frank Langdon is Down Bad

Language:
English

Series:
Part 1 of you break, it makes me bloom

Stats:
Published: 2025-09-08 Words: 7,967 Chapters: 1/1

it's like i'm made of you (to adam, from your ribs)

by ghcsthouse

Summary

Robby hears it, if only distantly.

It’s only when he looks over the top of his computer, watching in real time as Dana pales and Samira’s face twists itself into something that can only be described as nauseated, that it clicks into place for him.

or: Langdon gets brought in to PTMC. They find out that the love remains, after all.

Notes

hello to my fellow toxic situationship enjoyers!

i wrote this pretty quickly, and it is definitely not one of my best works (as in, i didn't work on it for as long as i usually do) but it felt ready to go out being what it is :) also!! this is set vaguely after season 2, so it is schroedingers canon compliant until january

a big thank you as always to the loml vya centuryofverse for beta reading and being my token pre-med friend to help with the medical descriptions. there are probably still some inaccuracies though, as the early education major in me prevails nevertheless

See the end of the work for more notes

Robby hears it, if only distantly.

The sounds of Dana, Samira, and Perlah running to meet the stretcher as it's wheeled inside. The EMTs, rushing through their presentation as always. The non-stop electric hiss of the automatic doors.

The EMT to the left says, "Male, likely 30s, no ID, found unconscious by a jogger with intermittent LOC and visible chest rise/fall with an RR of 15, O2 99. Heart rate 82, BP 90/59. Sternum rub successful, GSC 10 determined by neuro test administered during a very brief period of consciousness. Pupils are pinpoint and reactive, but barely. Full body palpitations showed response to pain in the head, neck, and back, as well as the ULQ of the abdomen."

Honestly, it's all so standard, so mundane, that it doesn't really resonate. Guy probably tripped and hit his head. As long as he's not bleeding, he'll be fine. Plus, Robby's just about wrapped up for the day and not super eager to jump into anything that doesn't seem particularly life-threatening.

It's only when Robby looks over the top of his computer, watching in real time as Dana pales and Samira's face twists itself into something that can only be described as nauseated, that something clicks into place for him. (Even Perlah, who has the coolest composure of them all, momentarily loses focus and flicks her eyes over to Robby like a bomb is about to go off.)

Robby finds himself at their side in no less than the time it takes him to glove up and grab his stethoscope from where it was lying beside his keyboard, propelled by some unknown force, or this burning, desolate instinct that floods the space between his ribs.

As he approaches, Dana turns sharply on the balls of her feet, hovering the palms of her hands over the inside crook of Robby's elbow, solidly wedging herself between Robby and the patient.

"Robby," She warns, the same twisted look on her face as when her nose has been broken. "Get someone else. I think Shen's in already—"

"What?" Robby says, suddenly very conscious of how his eyes narrow – and every other tick underneath his skin – as he tries to push past her. She's never, not in all the years they've known each other, tried to *bench him.* Not even in the movements where he'd very much deserved it.

"Go get someone else," Dana says again, looking over her shoulder and keeping herself firmly between Robby and the gurney. "You don't want this one. Please, just trust me on this."

Robby's brain short-circuits for a moment, because what does *that* mean? He racks his brain trying to come up with names of people he knows or conditions that might ring as sore subjects to him, but comes up empty.

He watches as more people rush to the side of the gurney Samira and Perlah are on — Santos, McKay, Princess, and three more nurses he can't bother to catalogue right now — and carefully takes in each of their individual reactions.

It's when he sees basically every reaction under the sun *except* for professional neutrality that he pushes past Dana.

Immediately, he wishes he hadn't. But, you know what they say about hindsight.

Because the guy lying on the gurney, who *probably tripped and hit his head* and *would be fine,* is Langdon – and he definitely does *not* look fine.

He's lying there, broken blood vessels blooming into under-eye bruising, rapidly drying blood tacked on his face, blinking heavily. Robby thinks he hears him mumble something, but it comes out sounding like a bloody choke.

Samira kicks into high gear, delegating with the swift tact he'd expect of his newly minted senior resident, but he doesn't feel the pride he should.

He doesn't really know how he feels. He's not sure that he even *does* feel right now. His mind has gone completely blank, save for the incessant blaring of the alarm that is *Langdon, Langdon, Langdon.*

The other doctors and nurses buzz around him like flies drawn to a rotting corpse. Robby just stands there.

Santos, in what is really more of a stage whisper than a real one, says to Princess: "They should have hit him with some Narcan."

"Woah," McKay exhales, a very overtly maternal tone to her voice. "I'm sure if it was necessary, they would have."

“Agreed, I don’t see a need for it,” Samira says, overly careful with her words as always. Robby notes, vaguely, this sharp look she flashes across the gurney at Santos. “He’s responding to pain, he’s conscious —”

It’s then, in all of its full-bodied irony, that Langdon loses consciousness again. His eyes, which were already low-lidded and unfocused, fall shut. His shoulders slump limply in on themselves.

“Well, not anymore,” Santos points out, a vague smirk ghosting over her face. Usually, Robby would be understanding regarding the sharp-edged attitude she puts on. Not now.

Robby tries to speak, to say something about a CBC and CMP, or a FAST scan of the abdomen to check for internal bleeding or tamponade, but the words stick to the back of his throat.

In a very sudden, almost clarifying moment, Robby becomes distinctly aware that Langdon could be dying. This could be Langdon dying, and all Robby would have done is watch it happen. It knocks the wind out of him: *it’s happening again. It’s happening again.*

“Now would be the time, MoMo,” Santos says again, a lilt to her voice like she’s trying to provoke a reaction. “Why don’t we just give him some now?”

“I’m not—“ Samira says through gritted teeth, uncharacteristically harsh. “I’m not sure he *needs* it.”

Her hands are all over Langdon, hovering her stethoscope over his chest, palpating on his abdomen, searching for signs of life at his pulse points. It fires up this hot, sickening sense of possessiveness that pools at the base of Robby’s spine.

“But,” Santos draws out the word. “What if he does, and he—”

“Trinity, I’m not going to *waste* a dose if he—”

“—doesn’t get it because you weren’t sure?”

There’s a beat of silence.

Robby thinks he feels Dana’s hand braced against the back of his bicep, urging him to step away, but Langdon is so, *so* pale, the vaguely brown blood a stark contrast against the rest of his face.

“Okay, fine,” Samira says, her eyes focused and frantic at the same time. She looks at Robby, frozen, and sees what must be obvious distress on his face, then turns to Princess: “Push 0.4 milligrams of IV Narcan.”

“No,” Robby hears himself say at last, far harsher than he’d meant to. His hands have an iron-clad grip on his side of the gurney; he can’t even look at them, at Langdon. He squeezes his eyes shut for the briefest moment. “No Narcan.”

He looks at Princess, narrowing his eyes and pulling the Narcan from her hands.

Because, seriously, that’s just fucking ridiculous.

Langdon’s gone through too much, come too far, in the past ten months for him to do something so reckless. Kiara sees it. His sponsor — who sends Robby written monthly reports — sees it. Even Robby sees it, despite it taking ten months plus the entirety of his sabbatical following Langdon’s initial return. (So then why does it seem like no one else does? Is this who Langdon is to them now? Some unchangeable junkie? He’d been someone, once. Robby thinks he still is. He hopes he still is.)

They should have hit him with some Narcan, Santos' voice rings clear in his ears *why don’t we just give him some now?*

(And, like, sure, it makes sense. Robby remembers his own voice, too, how he’d hit every sore spot he could think of. *You should have come to me. You let me down. This job will fuck you up if you let it, and you let it.* Langdon had been that ‘unchangeable junkie’ to him, too. All she’s doing — all anyone is doing, really — is follow the example he'd set. *Robby* had been the one to set the precedent.)

“Robby—” Dana breathes from behind him, her voice going low and soft. Like she’s gearing up to talk him off the ledge.

Robby can physically feel how the energy in the room shifted. It reeks of pity, now. Of ‘*you’re so close that it’s clouding your judgment.’*

“No fucking Narcan,” Robby spits, shaking everything else — every thought, every concerned look, every body — away and zeroing in on Langdon.

He checks Langdon’s eyes himself, watching as the black pinpoints, swallowed in a sea of blue, lag for a few seconds before slowly

starting to dilate. *(And, fuck, if some of the ice in Robby's veins doesn't melt the second they react.)*

"Why not?" Santos asks, a typical air of sarcasm clearly present in her voice. "Might help."

"Because he's not ODing," Robby bites, almost tripping over himself as they finally park Langdon in one of the two trauma bays. "He doesn't *need it."*

"Okay, you're the boss," Santos says. She shrugs her shoulders, sharply reminding Robby just how little stake she has in this. How little stake *everyone but him* has in this. "So, if he doesn't need Narcan, then what *does* he need?"

Robby takes over. He'll apologize to Samira later.

When Langdon finds himself in the ambulance after the initial hit, he's completely unaware of pretty much everything that's currently going on around him.

He doesn't register the voices of the EMTs, the questions they ask, the tests they perform, and he doesn't really have any idea of how serious his condition is, but figures it's got to be at least semi-serious since he can feel the jostling of them swerving in and out of lanes on the bridge.

To be fair to himself, though, the splitting headache piercing through his frontal lobe and the familiar burn of nausea ripping through his stomach make it hard to focus on anything else.

But the one thing he does know, with any sense of certainty, is that he was in PTMC's catchment zone when he'd been hit in the ribs by one guy and had his head knocked face-first against a brick wall by another, who then proceeded to help himself to Langdon's wallet and phone. *(Please, remind him to never go running in Point State Park after the sun goes down ever again.)*

When the EMTs roll him through the automatic doors, the bright overhead lighting hits him all at once and forces him to clamp his eyes shut. Another wave of nausea hits. He hears the blood rushing around

and bouncing off the walls of his skull.

Langdon's first thought upon seeing the distorted, yet achingly familiar setting of the Pitt is: *Huh. So this is what the ED looks like from the other way around.*

His second thought is: *Abso-fucking-lutely not.*

"Fucking— send me to Presby," He chokes out, a searing sense of embarrassment adding to the fire of nausea in his stomach.

Either no one hears it, or no one cares. *(It's probably the former. His own voice had registered to him as a gargled mess.)*

He's only been back for, what, three and a half months? It wasn't supposed to be like this. He was supposed to be free of weakness, a presentation of pure, absolute strength. It was supposed to be a full recovery — a *literal* rehabilitation.

This, Langdon thinks, isn't exactly the image he'd been trying to project.

So, he tries again. *"Send me— fuck, somewhere else."*

He was supposed to take these three months, the ones Robby had spent riding his motorcycle (which, don't even get him *started* on that mid-life crisis) around the country, and turn himself back into someone worthy of standing next to him — of standing in the sun.

The faces of the people who swarm him are blurry and vague, but Langdon feels Samira's unmistakably gentle, professional touch against his torso. He hears Dana, her voice low in warning. He sees— sees—

Oh.

He sees Robby, staring down at him with a look that can only be described as dawning horror on his face. He sees Robby, with his distinctly sad-looking eyes and all of the blood drained from his face. He sees Robby, and he physically feels his heart rate spike.

For a second, it feels like it has to be a hallucination, or the ghost of something that used to exist between them, nameless and worn at the edges, coming back to haunt him.

He didn't even know Robby was back yet. (Or maybe he did. He can't

quite remember right now, but it feels like seeing him for the first time all over again.)

Everything else is hazy, but the features of Robby's face, the ones that Langdon had never been able to scrub from behind his eyelids, stand out soft, clear, and borderline messianic among the rest.

Langdon very quickly makes the decision to focus on Robby's face as his own personal neuro exam, cataloguing every familiar feature and detail down to the lines under his eyes and the twitching muscle at his brow, just to prove to himself that he hasn't sustained any significant head trauma. Everything seems in order, down to the set of his jaw.

It all proves to be too much for Langdon to handle in his current state, the ambulance, Robby real and vaguely glowing in front of him, the horror on his face melting into something resembling a bone-deep fear that he hadn't seen since PittFest.

He claws and fights to keep himself awake — to project that strength he'd been so hyperfocused on — but ultimately slips back into unconsciousness.

Robby is staring at the monitors, about a minute and a half into this most recent LOC, when Langdon's heart rate goes from 130, to 160, to 190 in under a minute.

Then, just as it threatens to spill over 210, his heart stops completely.

Technically speaking, Frank Langdon is dead for about three and a half minutes.

Langdon thinks he sees a few things floating around in the dark haze on the border of consciousness.

His mother, first and foremost. She's all dark hair and Langdon's own eyes staring back at him. He sees her through a fog of childlike wonder — invincible. All-encompassing. Safe.

For the briefest moment, she's there, just a handful of feet away from him, and nothing bad has happened to him yet.

A shriek cuts through the surrealist creation his brain has made.

It's then that he sees Abby and his kids, frozen in time. It's Tanner as he was at four — rapidly approaching five — not being able to understand him when he says *Daddy has to go away for a while.* It's Abby, with her back turned. Next to her, it's Penny, his baby girl, crying so hard her little face goes red as she *reaches for him—*

Then, it's his father. He doesn't stay for long. He never does.

The last thing he sees, or thinks he sees, are hands, the rough skin of them pushing his hair back and tracing a line from his nose to brow to cheekbone. He sees downturned eyes. Shoulders. Messy hair. A nose. Biceps.

He hears a voice, rough, familiar, as the pieces start to thread themselves into something that could almost be the real thing.

The voice, Robby's voice, says things to him that it would never say. It aches for something that hasn't existed in years. Something soft, sentimental. (Langdon has never really known what he wanted. But now, through the distortion of his subconscious, he knows that he had it once.)

"Come on," Robby says, sort of far-out and unreal with this sweet, lovestruck look stuck onto his face. *"Stay with me."*

I'm here, he tries to say, but nothing comes out.

"No, don't do this to me," Robby pleads, taking Langdon by the wrist and guiding his hand to press gently against his ribcage. *"Please don't do this to me."*

Robby puts his own hand firmly on Langdon's ribcage, a perfect mirror image. Then, he crushes down, hard, then pulls his hand back sharply, dragging a tacky, jagged rib with him.

It burns in a way Langdon vaguely recognizes. It feels like his R2 year. Like the desire to feel some sort of guilt for his role in the progression of their relationship. Like screaming, fighting, and the clashing of Robby's teeth against his.

Then, before Langdon can even think to say something back: *"Fuck,*

your— your ribs, I'm so sorry, I'm so sorry. Please come back. Fucking— just come back,"

There's probably something biblical there, Langdon thinks. Some prickling reminiscence of Catholic school in the back of his mind.

Man, or Adam, or whatever you want to call him, confronted by an all-encompassing divine presence, a bone taken for its troubles. An overwhelming feeling of gratitude. The bone, grotesquely plucked out of place, shaped into something new. Something devotional.

The metaphor, conjured by his own subconscious, hits home the way it was probably meant to, but the roles are all wrong.

Langdon isn't Adam, and Robby isn't God. At least, not anymore.

Robby is Adam. The original, perfect, hallowed creation of something incomprehensible. If Langdon is anything in this story, he's the scraps of his bone being pieced together to try and form something whole. (Or maybe he's the snake, the mirage of a fallen angel, manipulative and tasked with the singular goal of pulling everyone else down with him.)

Just then, Robby is very suddenly brought back into this blinding focus, hovering over him with his face drawn tight and necklace dangling over Langdon's face.

There's a flash of white. The sounds of labored breathing. This very instinctual understanding that overtakes him and leaves him breathless. A stream of fire trailing through his veins— fucking *propofol,* and then he's out again.

Robby starts CPR at approximately 7:58 pm.

He wastes absolutely no time, letting muscle memory kick in as he tries to shut his mind off. He stiffens his shoulders and locks his elbows.

2 inches down. No less than 110 beats per minute.

He zeroes in on the task at hand: pushing and pulling at Langdon's heart and willing it to start again.

“Come on,” Robby breathes, his eyes darting back and forth between the monitor and the newly broken bend on the bridge of Langdon’s nose. Each new injury he catalogs is a dizzying reality check. “Stay with me.”

There’s this part of him, deep from the pit of his chest, that aches to lean down and set his nose back into place. To mold Langdon back into a version of something — or someone — that Robby recognizes.

There’s Langdon’s voice, somewhere vaguely in the back of Robby’s head, replaying the time Langdon had come into work with a split lip, courtesy of his 2 year olds foot, and asked — all hushed and breathy as he’d leaned up into him with this self-satisfied grin — if Robby wanted to *‘kiss it better.’*

(Robby remembers the feeling of the tips of his ears burning. Viscerally. He remembers how the smile on Langdon’s face had faltered, but not dropped, a matching flush of red setting high on his cheekbones when Robby hadn’t shot back with a typical, dismissive response.

Even more, Robby remembers how every interaction following that had shifted. The air between them having taken on this charged tension of *‘which one of us will break first?’*

Ultimately, it was Robby. It’s always Robby.)

They’re going on two and a half minutes of Langdon’s heart rate stubbornly stuck at zero.

The monitors to his left continue to beep, a shrill cacophony.

He’s dying, Robby’s inner monologue taunts, *he’s dying, and there’s nothing you can do about it.*

The staff have all stopped moving, pushing themselves up against the walls to create distance. It’s only Dana, characteristically resolute and unafraid, who stands close behind him, her voice a disjointed, fractured thing that rings in his ears.

He hears her calling his name, his *first* name, which would usually trigger the alarm bells in his head that come with the unfamiliar stretch of syllables from someone that isn’t his grandmother — *Mik-hai-el* — but it falls flat now.

It’s all your fault. Adamson, Leah, Langdon. It’s always your fault.

Three minutes into CPR, and there's still no change.

Before he has time to filter it out, to keep the past wrapped in the neat little box he'd kept it in, he says: "No, don't do this to me, please don't do this to me."

Pressure — hot and overwhelming — swells in Robby's chest. His shoulders burn. Sweat, or tears, maybe, drip down and dot along Langdon's collarbones and mix with the dried blood on his neck. His vision starts to go blurry and static-y at the edges.

"Robby," Dana whispers, the palm of her hand flattening against his back. "Let me take over."

Over his dead body. If anyone is going to bring Langdon back, it's going to be Robby. Because these people— they don't *know* Langdon the way he does. They don't know what he *needs* the way Robby does.

He pushes harder, deeper, into Langdon's chest. A wordless, violent plea to get his heart beating again. He pushes with the weight of his entire body, the weight of the past, the weight of all the love he still carries with him.

Robby mumbles out an indistinct prayer, fragments of about twelve different ones stitched together. He pushes down again, a deafening *CRACK!* echoing out in the trauma bay. One of the nurses barely conceals her sound of surprise before being sent out of the room.

"Fuck, your— your ribs, I'm so sorry, I'm so sorry," The words tumble from between Robby's lips, frantic, desperate, and incessant. It's a painstakingly intimate moment, which Robby is very aware of and is sure that it will fire up the rumor mill, but he can't find it in himself to stop.

"Okay, hey—" Dana tries again, audibly more frantic this time. She's probably thinking about lawsuits, malpractice, whatever, but Robby literally could not care less right now. He'll gladly take the lawsuit if it means Langdon comes out of it alive. *"Michael—"*

"Please come back," Robby laments, his own voice sounding foreign as the weight in his chest grows to be unbearable. "Fucking— just come *back,"*

It's then that the monitor starts back up, the beeping steadying out as the big, bold zero on the monitor jumps back up.

Robby distantly feels Dana pulling him off of Langdon and sitting him down against the dividing wall of Trauma One and Two. She puts two fingers against his pulse and looks down at her watch.

Robby zeroes in on the furrow of her brow, the steady beeping of the monitors, and the sounds of Langdon's ragged breathing.

He thinks he hears her telling someone to call Kiara. (Why? Langdon's back, there's no need for—)

There are words like *tamponade* and *catheter* and *pericardium* being thrown around, and Robby has got to get back in there. His team is staffed with great doctors, but they're not Robby. Again, they don't *know* Langdon like he does, the slant of his shoulders, the specific beat of his heart, the—

Dana pushes his shoulders back down. He hadn't even realized that he'd tried to get up.

"It's okay," Dana whispers, her face an image of reassurance and perfect bedside manner. "He's okay, you got him back, you—"

It hits him then.

He got him *back.* Langdon is breathing, alive, his heart back up and running.

Thank fucking God.

The next time Langdon wakes up, it's only for a few brief moments.

His ribs are swollen, wrapped tightly with gauze, and burn with every inhale. His face is a different story — this heavy sinus pressure pushing against the inside of his skull.

He looks around, bleary and not super aware, at the ceiling, the monitors, the ugly curtains of Central Twelve.

Langdon strains to see out the window and sees the unmistakable image of Robby, with his back to him and shoulders curved in on himself.

And, okay, sure, Langdon's brush with death has him feeling some type of way. Sentimental, maybe, so he lets himself map the outline of the silhouette he's come to know so well he could probably recognize him blind, through the dark heat of night.

He tracks the slightest tilt of Robby's head. The curling of hair at the base of his neck, his temples. The broad expanse of his back and shoulders, trembling. His hands open and close, clenching and unclenching in a gesture Langdon recognizes as a desperate grasp for emotional regulation.

It clicks almost instantly that something's happened.

He recognizes the group of 'symptoms' as the come-down of one of his panic attacks, something that he's seen a million times. He feels his usual spike of guilt about having weaponized it against him draw deeper tonight, knowing he's caused this yet again. (Fuck, Robby was right. He *does* cause breakdowns in others. Or, in Robby, at least.)

So, it makes sense that the woman standing in front of Robby is Kiara, or he at least thinks it's Kiara from what little he can see through the swelling around his eyes, with Samira next to her, a typical, soft-eyed look of concern on both of their faces.

He must have made eye contact with one of the two women, because Samira pushes past Robby and starts harassing him with a bright light and questions like *"what's your name?"* and *"Do you know where you are?"* and *"Can you tell me who the president is?"* (to which, Langdon quickly responds: *"Ugh. That fucking guy.")* in what feels like a fraction of a second.

"Ow, Samira, Jesus *Christ,"* He says, his voice coming out scratchy and hurting his ribs more. He tries to lift his hand to cover his eyes but the pain that shoots up his side when he moves stops him in his tracks. "Shit— what the hell happened?"

"You, uh, were brought in by the EMTs, presenting with—"

"No, I know—" Langdon groans. Speaking really takes more effort than it's worth. "After that."

"Right, yes," Samira breathes, shaking her head. Kiara and Robby materialize in the doorway behind her, their faces slightly too far away to make out, but Langdon catches the bright red rimming around Robby's eyes, a stark contrast to the brown of his iris. "So, you were tachycardic when you came in, and after you lost

consciousness…”

She turns over her shoulder and looks at them, trading these unsure glances.

“You don’t have to—” Langdon breathes, eager for this to all be over so he can go back to sleep for another few hours. He’s fucking *exhausted.* “You can just tell me.”

Samira looks at him, her voice and face becoming resolute. “You experienced temporary cardiac arrest due to a pooling of blood around your heart. Robby— sorry, *Doctor* Robby performed CPR, during which you sustained two broken ribs—”

“Oh, okay, cool, great,” Langdon says, leaning his head back against his pillow and staring at the ceiling. (He should be mad, but it was Robby. He doesn’t think he can ever really be mad at Robby. Plus, what’s some broken ribs in addition to the ten million other fucking injuries he already has?)

“—Doctor McKay and I performed a pericardiocentesis to drain the fluid. We suspect you have a concussion since the blow to your head left you with a broken nose.”

“Someone will be down shortly to set it,” The nurse, who Langdon doesn’t recognize and didn’t even realize was in the room, asides to Samira.

From her place in the doorway, Kiara adds, “We’ve contacted local police. They should be ready to take your statement whenever you are.”

Wait, what the fuck? How do they even know he needs police?

“The jogger that found you told EMS that he saw them take your phone and wallet after the assault,” Kiara says, very matter-of-factly.

Great. Cool. Awesome. So, he definitely said that out loud, the filter of his stupid, concussed brain not working, and to add the cherry on top, everyone apparently knows he got mugged. Just what he needed right now.

Langdon is quiet for a long moment, just staring up at the buzzing fluorescents and breathing through the pounding headache he’s currently nursing.

He's starting to realize that this — everything about this — is really too much for him to handle right now. His whole body is on fire, he can feel every breath, and he's not really used to the intensity of Robby's gaze anymore. (He's gone without it for so long, now it makes his head spin. It's like a burst of sunlight. Like this addictive haze that clouds his senses. Without it, he's barely been able to focus.)

Black starts to seep in through his periphery. Maybe it's the concussion, or maybe it's just pure exhaustion.

He barely even realizes when he passes out again.

Against his better judgment, Robby stays by Langdon's side.

After she'd talked him down, pulled him out of whatever haze he'd been drowning in, Kiara had told him, in no uncertain terms, to go home. To allow himself the space he, quote, 'definitely needs' to process the experience of Langdon coming in and blah, blah, blah.

Though he'd said he would consider it, it was never a question that he'd be staying. It never is. It's like there's this magnetic pull between Robby and Langdon. One that neither of them has ever been able to escape. Despite all of the hurt, not just on Robby's side, either, because he knows he's probably been a lot harsher than he could have been.

Once Kiara and Samira leave, he very slowly closes the door to Langdon's room and pulls the curtains shut to give him some privacy. He knows how embarrassing this must be for him, because if it were Robby, he'd be *mortified,* and the two of them are really more alike than either of them would like to admit.

(Robby remembers how once, in the dead of night, Langdon, pressed to his side in one of the two conference hotel beds, had whispered: *It's like I'm made of you.* Inexplicably, Robby knew that a small part of him, tucked away in the bone and marrow and tissue of him, had felt something similar. He couldn't say it back at the time, so he had resolved to kiss Langdon through the early hours of the sunrise in the hopes that it would get the message across. Maybe it did. He hopes it did.)

The first thing Robby does when they're alone is use a wet paper towel to clean the dry, flaking blood from Langdon's face.

He scrubs the blood wordlessly, a blistering feeling of devotion and something vaguely resembling worship breathing down his neck. Robby traces the warm, squelching paper towel from the creases of his neck to the sharp line of his jaw to the soft pads of his lips. He tries his best to go gently over the under-eye bruising, careful not to poke or prod or hurt him even more than he already has.

It's yet another painfully intimate act, each gentle brush of warm water chipping away at the proof of something that Robby can't help but feel like he could have prevented if he'd kept Langdon close. If he hadn't let himself give in to the heat of the betrayal and push him away towards somewhere that Robby couldn't follow.

If, if, if.

The thing about reminiscence — that pervasive sort of nostalgia — the part that no one ever tells you about, Robby thinks, is that you don't get to pick and choose. You have to take all of the bad, too, even when all you really want is the good.

But Robby's been focusing on the bad his entire life. There's something about watching Langdon code, about pulling him back from the brink with his own two hands, that makes him laser in on the good.

The good is this: This is his proof that the love remains, even if nothing else does. The soft, grounding touches in the sweltering pressure of the ED. The scrap paper notes slipped into scrub pockets. The effortless devotion.

Langdon wakes up on and off for the next few hours, rotating between asking for his kids and his mother, who, when Robby had called, put on this tentative voice and asked how *Robby* was doing, after ensuring her son was okay. Robby tried not to read into it when she'd told him to *take care of himself*.

Occasionally, Langdon will tilt his head and look over at Robby with this far-out, borderline tender look on his face.

The first time it happened, the night-shift nurse had just left after giving him another bump of painkillers. Langdon had stared at Robby, slumped forward in the chair he'd pulled to the bedside, and ghosted the tips of his fingers down Robby's beard, the purple-black bags

under his eyes, the tip of his nose.

All he'd said was: *"Are you real?"*

All Robby had said back was: *"I'd hope so."*

Robby had taken Langdon by the wrist, pressing the smooth skin of his palm against the scratch of his beard.

For the briefest moment after Robby had taken hold of him, something like remembrance flashed across his face before he was out again.

The second time Langdon looks over at him, he more or less asks the same thing again, but it comes out sounding more like a clinical observation.

"You stayed."

"Of course I stayed," Robby whispers, reaching out and pushing the hair away from Langdon's forehead.

Langdon lets a beat of silence draw out for an uncharacteristically long period of time, which tugs at Robby somewhere between his heart and throat.

Then: "I wasn't sure that you would."

"Why wouldn't I?" Robby asks, like he hasn't been doing everything in his power to make sure their paths don't cross. (What he still hasn't had the guts to say since everything had gone down, is that Langdon had desperately needed the space to heal, and Robby knew he wouldn't get it if he didn't force it on him. Robby had been too mad, too very rightfully betrayed to be anything other than a distraction.)

You know why, Langdon doesn't say.

"Whatever, you're here now," Langdon does say, this loopy, morphine-dazed grin making its way across his face. His words bleed into each other. "It sucks," he adds, "when you're not there."

Oh. Okay.

There's this shift in the air, like a key change in one of those radio pop-punk songs Langdon likes, or the revealing shift in camera focus in one of the golden-age era films Robby makes him watch.

“Yeah?” Robby swallows. It goes down like a ball of lead.

“Yeah,” Langdon says, very seriously. He goes for the hand Robby has tangled in his hair, pressing their palms together and lacing their fingers. Then, drawing out his vowels: “I think you should stay, this time.”

Robby tries not to think about this, but when has he ever done a good job of that?

Before this exact moment, he’d never really considered that Langdon would have experienced the degradation of their relationship first-hand and defined it as *Robby* being the one who left.

After all, Robby wasn’t the one who snuck home in the middle of the night to the wife he wouldn’t talk to him about. Robby wasn’t the one who’d shattered the almost instantaneous trust between them. Robby wasn’t the one who—

Something in him stops, screams out: *No. Not right now.*

He’s been too mad for too long. Maybe it’s time to let it all go.

Robby takes a deep breath and does just that.

He’s telling the truth when he says, “I’m not going anywhere.”

“Promise me,” Langdon slurs, the lull of fatigue and sedation creeping back in. His eyelids start to hang low, cutting across the blue that Robby can’t help but find himself still fixated on, five years later.

“I promise,” Robby says softly. Honestly. Deliberately. He brings the backside of Langdon’s hand, their fingers still locked, and presses his lips against cracked knuckles. Against the skin, he mumbles out hot, fervent affirmations. *“I swear.”*

“Okay,” Langdon breathes, his eyes closing again as his head falls back against the pillow with this small, satisfied smile playing on his face. “Love you, say it back.”

For the first time since Langdon had been brought in, Robby laughs, if only gently.

It’s their thing, *say it back.* He’s honestly surprised that Langdon, through the haze of the morphine drip, still remembers. (Then again, it’s Langdon. Robby knows firsthand how strangely sentimental he can

get. He remembers everything.)

“Love you,” Robby says back, like he always does. Like he always will. “Said it back.”

Robby finally lets himself fall asleep a few hours after Langdon had passed out again. He had made sure Langdon was asleep for the night, that the night nurse the weight of the workday and his 6:00 am wake-up bearing down on him.

For the first time since they’d gone their separate ways, Robby gets a good night's sleep, knowing that Langdon is here, within arm's reach. He isn’t out somewhere hurting, and no one is hurting him. He gently lays his head against the dip of Langdon’s hip, where it starts to stretch into the taut muscles of his stomach, so as not to put any further strain on the already harrowing injuries.

The last thing he registers before getting a taste of the sleep that Langdon has been sampling on and off all evening is the unconscious shift of his body and the tangling of his fingers into Robby’s hair.

Langdon isn’t really the kind of guy who sleeps. He never really has been, but especially not in the past few years. (What he means to say is that he can’t sleep without the weight of Robby’s body pressing him into the memory foam. The first night he’d stayed over at Robby’s apartment, sending some bullshit excuse to Abby that came too easily, was the best night's sleep he’d gotten in years.)

So, it’s a bit of a surprise when he finally wakes up — for good this time — and feels something other than dead tired. It’s contentment, almost. Fulfillment, maybe. Somehow, it almost feels like a new start. A rebirth.

Everything clicks into place when he looks down.

Because there, with his cheek pressed into the angle of Langdon’s hip bone, nose brushing against the underside of his belly button, and a line of drool pooling on the cheap hospital blanket, is Robby. (It doesn’t look like the most comfortable position, plus, Langdon remembers how Robby likes to lay his head higher up on Langdon’s stomach. But, he’s the one who had broken two of his ribs and

rendered his favorite spot OOC for the foreseeable future.)

There's this part of Langdon's chest that swells when he thinks about Robby, ever tender and conscientious, navigating the minefield of his upper abdominal injuries.

The palm of Langdon's hand rests gently on the back of Robby's neck, with Robby's hand circling Langdon's forearm, keeping him solidly in place. Mindlessly, he goes to run small circles at the base of his hairline.

For the briefest moment, Langdon thinks that this could have been his life. He could have done this every day, all the way up until the end. Easily. If they had gotten four months or forty years, it still wouldn't be enough.

Maybe if he hadn't met Robby six months too late, or maybe if he hadn't spent the last five years holding back all of his want, if he didn't want as much as he did in the first place — it's a trait that showed itself early in his childhood, this overzealous and covetous nature — if he didn't spend every free hour hiding from his wife the fact that he knew he'd married the wrong person less than a year in.

It's then, almost as if Robby is attuned to the beating of his heart (which, honestly, Langdon thinks he might be) that Robby wakes up.

He picks up his head, all bleary eyes and pressure creases carved along the smoothness of his cheek, and takes his hand. Something in Langdon craves to reach out and trace each line, each indent, in this regrettably sentimental way he'd given up the second he'd let himself get caught with Librium in his locker.

"You're up," Robby says, the familiar grogginess of his drawn-out vowels ringing like the low-pitched whistle of a bomb moments before detonating.

Langdon fumbles for something to say, but loses himself when he notices Robby's eyes darting around his face, his jaw, the curve of his throat.

So, what he ends up saying is: "You should see the other guy."

Landon breathes in the feeling of watching Robby's head drop with this quiet, almost disbelieving laugh. He'd bottle it, if he could. Save it for those hot, frenzied nights where nothing brings him down except the memory of Robby's voice, his hands, his face.

Brushing his thumb over the pulse point of Langdon's wrist, Robby asks, stutter-y and breathy: "How are you feeling? Okay?"

"Hm," Langdon pretends to think. "Kind of like someone broke two of my ribs."

Robby dips his head. "Yeah, uh, I'm sorry… about that, I shouldn't— I wasn't in the right headspace to be doing that—"

"Woah, man, hey," Langdon says, the sudden urgency in his voice prompting Robby to turn to look back up at him. "No harm, no foul. I'm more worried about the whole 'needing a new phone' situation. Those things are *not* cheap."

"Yeah," Robby says back, letting out this kind of tired mix of a sigh and a laugh. "I'm sure the cops will find your old one, though."

"Ugh, whatever," Langdon brushes it off, but the next words come out like there's something tugging at them. "Uh, thank you, by the way."

Robby tilts his head and looks at him with this bewildered expression. "Huh?"

"For, you know," Langdon gestures vaguely down to his various bruises and bandages. "Stepping in, I guess. You didn't have to—"

"I did," Robby says, with this overwhelming sense of finality in it. Like that's it. That's all there is to say. *"I did."*

Langdon swallows, suddenly overcome with a sense of meaning that he doesn't want to go into right now.

"Well, still," Langdon ends up saying, his throat going dry as he tries his absolute best to just brush this off.

He thinks he should bring up sports, or new articles about whatever emergency medicine subspecialty Robby's fixated on this week, but they don't really *do* small talk anymore.

This is made very evident when Robby, almost breathlessly, says, "Always."

He brings Langdon's knuckles flush against the lower half of his face, resting the manageable weight of his head against the unharmed patches of skin on his fingers.

Langdon can feel the way Robby's lips move to form the words:

“Anything. You know that.”

Huh. *Does* he know that? In some dark, tucked-away corner of his mind, Langdon thinks he might, or he used to, at least.

“Do you—” Langdon starts, but holy shit, *no.* He can’t say that. He can’t bring himself to ask. He doesn’t think he could even stand to hear the answer.

“Huh?” Robby prompts, all soft eyes and raised brows, which is just such a complete and total 180. Langdon had resigned himself to never seeing this version of Robby, the one that only he gets to see, ever again.

But, here he is. Back from the dead. Staring at him like a vision of the past — this enigmatic, sanctified, untouchable thing. Langdon remembers Robby asking him, once, breathless as he’d rolled off of him, if he thought ‘the love remains.’ Who knows. Maybe it does.

Still, it throws him off so sharply that it startles the words out of him.

“Do you really mean that?” He groans, the taste of them raw and acidic and wrong in the back of his throat. “Like, even with everything?”

“Oh, well, yeah,” Robby answers, like it’s supposed to be obvious. “Even with everything.”

Langdon distantly wonders about everything left unsaid there. Every missing word etched between the lines of the present ones. Robby’s always had this cryptic, sort of minimalism to these kinds of talks.

“So, um,” Robby says again, after a bit. He closes his eyes and kind of scrunches his face together like he’s searching for the right words. “I was thinking that, uh, you could come and… stay. With me. While you’re recovering. If you’d like.”

“Oh, come on, man,” Langdon kind of laughs, feeling this amused smile stretch over his teeth. “What, you don’t think I can handle it?”

“No, I don’t,” Robby says, completely honest and echoing Langdon’s half-laugh. “You’d do a lot better, *medically* speaking, of course, if you had some help. It’ll be a rough 2-6 weeks.”

Langdon internally groans at the idea of 2-6 weeks out of work, nursing broken bones, and watching shitty TV on his couch. But, then

again, it could be 2-6 weeks out of work, nursing broken bones, and watching shitty TV on *Robby's* couch.

Maybe he can live with that.

"I think," Langdon breathes, dropping his voice low and pressing *that* specific button. "You just want me to yourself."

Langdon pulls back, a swell of satisfaction hitting as he watches the poorly concealed pink spread at the tips of Robby's ears. Inside, he's stoked that he didn't misread Robby's sudden gentleness with him.

Score, 0-1 Langdon.

"Maybe," Robby grins, leaning closer inch by tension-filled inch. "Or maybe I just like taking care of you."

Oh. Okay. Well. That's just. Shit.

Score, 1-1.

"Okay," Langdon says when he comes back to himself, this lingering electricity buzzing under his skin. "I'll stay, but you have *got* to get some food that isn't from the freezer section of Giant Eagle. Like, holy shit, I don't know how you're still alive."

"Send me a list," Robby says, only half-joking. "I'll go and get a few things for when you're discharged."

"Hm, I don't know," Langdon hums. "Don't think I forgot how bad you are at picking out produce."

"Okay, that was *one* time—" Robby starts, rolling his eyes with this poorly concealed fondness that stirs something in Langdon's gut. "We can go together, once you're up for it. God forbid I pick out another unripe avocado."

There's something about the domesticity of it all, grocery lists and trips to the store, Robby tending to his wounds — playing doctor, the hippocratic oath coursing through his blood, fights about *produce,* that makes Langdon think that the worst of it is behind them. That, maybe, *finally,* they can piece together the people they used to be — or create new ones entirely.

"I'll teach you how to pick 'em," Langdon breathes, this smile on his face as he lets his eyes drift from facial feature to facial feature.

"Oh, I'm *pretty sure* that I know how to pick 'em," Robby smiles back, leaning in.

Forty-two hours and one police interview later, Langdon is discharged.

Robby brings him back to his apartment and kisses him senseless the moment the front door shuts behind them, possessively caging his hands around his hips and the sides of his face. He reheats two bowls of matzo ball soup, saying something about *Jewish penicillin* as he — despite Langdon's insistence that his arms are working — brings spoonfuls to his mouth. Later, in bed, he presses gentle, open-mouthed, reverent kisses to the bruises on Langdon's ribcage.

Yeah. It's decided. He can definitely live with this.

End Notes

who up having a toxic on and off HR nightmare situationship with their boss?!?!?!?!?!

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